

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

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MARKEY SLAMS REPUBLICANS' FAILURE TO EXTEND FEDERAL JOBLESS BENEFITS

Washington, D.C.: Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, today criticized Republicans in Congress for failing to extend federal unemployment benefits, which are set to expire at the end of the year.

"Despite some recent data about GDP growth and productivity, the cold, hard truth is that millions of Americans are struggling to make ends meet. Rosy economic statistics may be cheered on Wall Street, but they're having little effect on Main Street. In the real world, many two-parent families are having a tough time making their mortgage payments; 3 million more Americans are living in poverty compared to two years ago; and 4.5 million workers who want a full-time job can't find one – they're being forced to work part-time at a fraction of what they used to make. And with the holiday season approaching, Republicans are sending a message to the 400,000 Americans whose unemployment benefits will soon expire – 'You're on your own,'" Rep. Markey said.

After December 27, 2003, the Temporary Extended Unemployment Compensation (TEUC) program, which provides federal unemployment benefits for jobless workers who have exhausted their state unemployment benefits, will no longer accept new enrollees. Every week after December 27, an estimated 80,000 Americans will be denied federal benefits when their state unemployment compensation runs out. In addition, the more than one million unemployed workers who already have exhausted their state benefits will be denied a federal extension.

"Instead of providing unemployed Americans with a small measure of comfort during the holiday season, Republicans have made a choice not to extend federal benefits before adjourning for the year. This is unconscionable. In Massachusetts, we have more than 190,000 people out of work and an unemployment rate that's only slightly below the national level. Our jobless workers deserve federal help," Rep. Markey said.

Rep. Markey is a co-sponsor of H.R. 3244, the Emergency Unemployment Compensation Act, introduced by Representative Rangel (D-NY) and Representative Cardin (D-MD). H.R. 3244 would extend the TEUC program through June 2004, increase the number of weeks of federal benefits for jobless workers from 13 weeks to 26 weeks, and expand unemployment insurance coverage for low-wage and part-time workers.

"It's clear that relief for working families hurt by job losses simply is not an important issue for Republicans these days. Republicans had an opportunity to deliver the necessary support for unemployment workers by immediately extending federal unemployment benefits. The GOP's failure to provide this badly needed extension speaks volumes about their misplaced priorities," Rep. Markey concluded.

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